CHAPTER 5

EVIDENTIALITY AND GROUNDING

5.0 Introduction

I start this chapter with a discussion of evidentiality as an obligatory grammatical category in Lahu Shi (Section 5.1), Then, in Section 5.2, I suggest that the evidentiality system can be considered grounding from a CG view. The complete discussion of the Lahu Shi evidentiality system, together with the grounding system, however, is outside the limit of this paper.

5.1 Evidentiality and grounding component.

According to Aikhenvald (n.d.), **evidentiality** is 'an obligatory grammatical category which has "source" of information as its primary meaning'. An example of this is whether the speaker personally saw the situation himself, or was told about it.

It is found that evidentials in Lahu Shi are organized under two main sources of knowledge, **first-hand** and **reported observations**. Each will be discussed in turn.

5.1.1 First-hand observation

By first hand observation, it means that the situation is witnessed by the speaker himself (Payne 1997: 70, 250ff). Lahu Shi has the distinction between visual and non-visual[41] terms, namely, *lar* and *paz* respectively. Consider the expressions in (30).

(30)a *Naleh* *awr* *cad* *chehd* **lar**

Naleh *rice* *eat* *PROG1* **Pe**

(I saw) Naleh eating.

   b. *Naleh* *awr* *cad* *chehd* **paz**

Naleh *rice* *eat* *PROG1* **Pe**

(I heard) Naleh eating.

The situation 'Naleh eating' can be described in two ways depending on how the speaker has learned this information. (30) a will be used if the speaker personally saw this happen. If the speaker just heard a noise of eating, (30) b would be used. Omitting an evidential results in an ungrammatical sentence.

5.1.2 Reported (or 'hearsay') information

Another type of evidential marker in Lahu Shi is the reported particle *ced*,

(31) *Ehrdawx* *yehq* *lo* *lag* *aq* **ced**

Ehrdawx *home* *LOC* *come* *move towards the speaker* **Pe**

Ehrdawx came home, someone said.

The information in (31) obtained through repetition of information related by someone else. That is, the speaker did not personally see Ehardawx come towards home but was told about his coming by someone else.

In uttering (31), the speaker does not claim to be sure of anything since he did not experience the situation himself. This is a way of distancing himself from the responsibility of the accuracy of the information.

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[41] The visual evidential refers to information acquired through seeing. The non-visual evidential implies sensory perception other than seeing (hearing, smell, taste, and touch). See more examples of Lahu Shi non-visual evidentials in Appendix C.

5.2 Evidentiality and grounding in Lahu Shi

We have seen that what evidentials do is they codify the source of information. However, it is not their only function.

Evidentials, I suggest, serve a grounding function specifying the relationship between some facet of the ground and the entity profiled by the clause. That is to say, evidentials can be considered grounding predications from a CG view. With the notion of grounding (See Section 3.3), reconsider the clausal expression (30) a above, rewritten as (31) below.

(31)   *Naleh   awr   cad   chehd* **lar**

       Naleh   rice   eat   PROG ***Pe***

       (I saw) Naleh eating.

The expression designates an event – a kind of 'eating' event, which is given by the verb *cad*. This process type is specified in greater detail by mention of the participants in the process, *Naleh*, and the object *awr* 'rice'. However, this specified process *Naleh awr cad* is only a type specification which has an indefinite number of potential instantiations, one of which is a progressive event which is indicated by *chehd*, as in (30) a. In other words, the specified process is instantiated by *chehd*.

Nevertheless, even though one instance of the process type is profiled (i.e., *Naleh awr cad chehd*), it is still not communicable. Put differently, the ground has not been evoked, and the status of this instance has not been indicated in relation to the ground yet. A clause is not complete until the speech-act participants can access the situation. What *lar* does is it evokes the ground component (the speaker) and locates the designated instance in relation to the ground. By means of *lar,* the speaker and the hearer have both succeeded in establishing mental contact with the designated process, indicating that it is personally witnessed by the speaker himself not by

someone else. In this way, the visual particle *lar* is capable of deriving a finite clause. Moreover, semantically *lar* offers a special perspective on a situation. In uttering (31), the speaker assesses the situation with respect to its likelihood. How *lar* evaluates the epistemic status of the situation will become clearer in Section 5.3. The clausal grounding can be depicted in Figure 27.
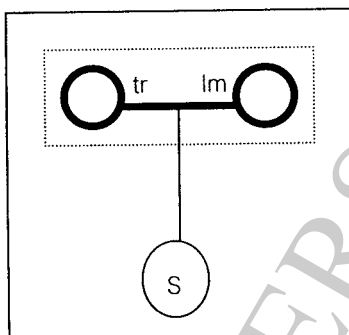
Figure 27. The clausal grounding

The speaker (labeled by S) is the ground component and falls within the scope of the expression in (30) a (the overall square in the diagram). But there it remains implicit and nonsalient, serving only as an 'offstage' reference point. In this way, it marks the speaker's observation as the source of information without any explicit mention. The onstage area is the dotted rectangle in the figure.

This grammatical behavior of *lar* (implicit reference point) is due to the observational experience of the speaker. In other words, it pertains to subjectivity. In this way, *lar* does not specifically mention the ground (the speaker), despite invoking it as a reference point (source of information).

By the same token, in uttering (30) b, the speaker locates the instance with respect to his observation. What distinguishes *paz* from *lar* is that *paz* offers a non-visual observation and in this particular example, it offers an auditory observation.

The reported particle *ced*, by contrast, invokes someone else's experience as the ground component.

In sum, the main import of the three evidentials is that they are 'deictic' in nature. That is, they help the speech act participants specify a relationship between some grounding component and the profiled process. However, not every deictic expression serves a grounding function in that it can turn verbs into finite clauses. Grounding elements in CG have certain additional properties.

Another additional property showing why the Lahu Shi evidentials are identified as grounding predications is that they allow conceptualizers to address the epistemic status of events. They assess a situation with respect to its likelihood. *Lar* and *paz* provide a high degree of certainty while *ced* a low degree. Moreover, they have grammatical status in that they are abstract and schematic semantically. These properties distinguish evidentials from other deictic expressions and make them serve as an obligatory grammatical element. Omitting them thus not only results in a non-communicable sentence, but an ungrammatical sentence as well.[42] In Section 5.3, I will show that visual attention is relevant to the grammatical property of *lar*.

5.3 Evidentiality and visual attention

I have suggested that the evidentials can be considered grounding elements. In this section, I focus on the visual evidential *lar* and show that it is not just a simple visual particle. That is, it is not always employed whenever the speaker personally sees a situation. Rather, the usage of *lar* depends on how the speaker sees the situation, to be more precise, on how the speaker visually pays attention to the

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[42] Here I distinguish a non-communicable sentence from a ungrammatical sentence since it is possible to have sentences that seem to obey all the syntactic rules but make no sense at all (for example, *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously*).

situation. A couple of examples will clarify this remark. Consider the situation 'playing football' experienced in various ways as described below.

Experience 1: Naleh rode a bicycle back home. On the way home, while she was passing a football field, she recognized her brother Ehrsanx playing with his friends. When she arrived home. Her mother asked 'where is Ehrsanx?' The perfectly reasonable answer is:

(32) *Ehrsanx* *bawqsir* *thez* *chehd* **lar**

  Ehrsanx *football* *kick* *PROG1* *Pe*

(I saw) Ehrsanx playing football.

Compare Experience 1 with Experience 2 below.

Experience 2: Naleh rode a bicycle back home. On the way home, while she was passing a football field, she saw a group of teenagers playing football. She stopped to see them playing. She saw her brother Ehrsanx in the group. When she got home. Her mother asked 'where is Ehrsanx?' However, even though she saw Ehrsanx playing football, it is considered unacceptable to reply (32) above. The correct answer is:

(33) *Ehrsanx* *bawqsir* *thez* *chehd* **aq**

  Ehrsanx *football* *kick* *PROG* **Pt**

Ehrsanx was playing football (the speaker was certain).

Take a different situation as another example.

Experience 3: Naleh helped her mother cook. She cleaned vegetables, and her mother chopped some pork. Then, Naleh's mother went out to pick some lemon grass in the garden. When she came back, she couldn't remember where she put the knife.

However, Naleh remembered seeing her mother chop some pork near the cupboard. Naleh said:

(34) *ateh*   *nawg*   *asid*   *ix*   *yehd*   *chehd*   **lar**

     knife   *you*   *just now*   *use*   *Pt*   **Pe**

     (I saw) you using knife just a minute ago.

Experience 4: Naleh helped her mother cook. She cleaned vegetables, and her mother chopped some pork. Then, Naleh's mother went out to pick some lemon grass in the garden. When she came back, she couldn't remember where she put the knife. Naleh saw where the knife was. However, it is pragmatically wrong to say (34) above [43]. In this situation, Naleh should say:

(35) *ateh*   *chuhr*   *huh*   *chehd*   *chehd*   *aq*

     knife   *here*   *LOC*   *stay*   *PROG1*   *Pt*

     The knife is here.

As seen above, not every situation which the speaker personally witness is marked by the visual particle *lar*. The usage of *lar* is closely tied to our visual experience, that is to say, how the situation is viewed.

People all experience rapidly changing input. However, they do not pay attention to all the sights that besiege them. What they do is choose to focus their attention on a particular input and leave others as background in their visual field. Furthermore, they constantly shift their attention from one entity to another. However, not every entity receives the same focus of attention. At a certain moment, the viewer (or the speaker) sometimes directs his attention on something. At another moment, he faces in a particular direction, having only a dimly perceived periphery. It

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[43] In uttering (34) in this situation, the speaker is saying it with sarcasm.

is when the speaker is dimly aware of his visual experience (that is, he has peripheral attention), I claim, that the visual particle *lar* is employed. Since the two situations in (33) and (35) are related to the specific focus of attention in that they are in great acuity, it is thus unacceptable to use *lar* in such situations.

At this point, one may ask what is so special about visual attention that it can motivate the use of *lar*. It is because, I assume, the focus of visual attention is intrinsically associated with the viewer's involvement in the situation. The peripheral visual attention, on the other hand, is related with the viewer's non-participation in the situation. This is one facet of construal concerning the specific 'perspective' imposed on the scene. This perspective subsumes the **viewing relationship** existing between the viewer and the scene. This remark can be diagramed as in Figure 29.

Figure 29. The speaker's participation

E is the event or situation, S is the speaker or the viewer, and the dashed arrow stands for the visual relationship between them. The dashed box labeled RP represents the region of participation. In the focus of viewing attention, the speaker participates either mentally or physically in the event. He is in the RP, as sketched in Figure 29 (a). In the peripheral viewing attention, the speaker is not involved in the situation. Rather he remains outside of the RP as a **glancer**, as diagramed in 29(b).

Since in Experiences 1 and 3 above Naleh did not pay attention on the two events. That is, she was not involved in the events. She was merely a glancer seeing her brother playing football, and her mother using a knife. *Lar* is thus employed in order to communicate her non-participatory relationship with the situation.

Because Naleh only has peripheral visual attention (that is, she is not involved in the situation), she thus is not absolutely committed to the certainty of the situation. As a result, it is possible to have a conversation like this.

Speaker A: *Ehrsanx bawqsir thez chehd lar* (I saw Ehrsanx playing football)

Speaker B: *Awg   chehq maog   la* (Really?)

Speaker A: *Chehd lar heh tea ghed ma* (Well, it looked like he was there)

It can be said that this peripheral visual attention or non-participatory relationship with the situation determines the epistemic status of *lar*. People are less certain of things they have seen prophetically or have not experienced directly.

It should be emphasized here that the discussion above is a prototypical case. Naturally, our visual experience extends beyond 'visual attention' to **'visual clarity'**. By visual clarity, I mean how clearly a situation is seen by the speaker. When the viewer cannot see a situation clearly (although he pays attention to it), *lar* is preferred as exemplified in (36).

(36)   *chikehneh   chehd chehd   lar*

    barking deer   stay   PROG1   Pe

    I saw a barking deer.

To assert (36), the speaker thought he was seeing a barking deer but he was not sure whether it was really a barking deer since he could not see it clearly.

5.4 Conclusion of Lahu Shi evidentials

Following Langacker (2002a), I consider evidentials in Lahu Shi as grounding elements. They are deictic in nature. They also have additional grammatical properties that are capable of deriving a finite clause. That is, they are highly grammaticized elements and also are inherently epistemic. Semantically, the evidentials offer a special perspective on a situation. That is, they assess a situation with respect to its reliability. Omitting them a sentence will result in an unacceptable sentence. Furthermore, the analysis shows that visual attention is relevant to the grammatical behavior of *lar*. Not every visual experience is linguistically encoded with *lar*. Its usage depends on whether the speaker has peripheral visual attention on the situation or whether he involves himself in the situation, which in turn determines the epistemic meaning of *lar*.